

# STERILIZATION IN THE EMPIRE

## An Account of the Working of the Alberta Act

By HILDA F. POCOCK

THE Canadian province of Alberta is the only place in the British Empire where voluntary sterilization of aments (mental defectives) is the law of the land. I had the pleasure last year of meeting the Minister of Agriculture and Health, the Hon. George Hoadley, at his headquarters in Edmonton, and of hearing from him the history of the passing of the Bill.

He is himself a farmer, and was struck, in the course of his business, with the importance of the laws of inheritance as applied to stock raising. Taking that application further to the human being, he came to the conclusion that in a new country, with a population of moderate size in healthy surroundings, some definite step should be taken to prevent the weakening of the race by the production of sub-normal individuals. Just at this time (1925), the Royal Commission on Mental Hygiene was sitting in British Columbia, and the findings of their report impressed him so much that he came to the conclusion that their recommendation for the sterilization of certain aments was one to be followed up. After a fairly stiff fight the Sexual Sterilization Act\* was passed by the Parliament in Edmonton and ratified by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. It has now been in force for the past four years, and some of its fiercest opponents are giving it their support because of the care with which it is being administered. So far 100 cases have been found suitable to undergo sterilization.

Supplementing this Act, an amendment to the Mental Diseases Act was passed, in which, by proclamation, the Ministry of Health can make a ward in any hospital a "psychopathic ward" within the meaning

of the Act, and so enable sterilization patients to have treatment in the General Hospitals, all operations being done from these psychopathic wards. Operations are performed in two cities, Edmonton for the northern part of the province, and Calgary for the southern. The Committee that administers this Act is composed of a doctor of science, the head of the State University at Edmonton, two doctors of medicine, and a lady who represents the Farmers' Wives' Association—a particularly able and active woman.

### THE ACT IN OPERATION

When an individual is recommended as a suitable candidate for sterilization by the head of a Mental Defective Training School, a social worker investigates the family history and home conditions and makes her report. An independent doctor, who is not a Government official, is then called in; he sees the patient alone and considers both reports. If he is in agreement, the patient (or the person responsible for him or her) asks for the operation in writing, the request being signed before witnesses. This is sent with the three reports to the Board for consideration, and forwarded to the Minister of Health, who consults the State legal authority; the patient is then sent to the nearest hospital and operated upon free of charge. After operation, patients are sent either to their homes, or to situations where they are under observation. If, however, they are young people whose parents or guardians ask for the operation but do not wish them to go to the training schools, special arrangements can be made. The Board ascertains that the training and home conditions are satisfactory, and after thorough investigation the patient is sent direct to the General Hospital and the opera-

\* The essential clauses of this were given on pp. 107-8 of the EUGENICS REVIEW, Vol. XX, No. 2, July 1928.

tion is done from the psychopathic ward. Dr. Malcolm R. Bow, Deputy Medical Officer of Health, kindly supplied the following analysis of the cases which have been approved and operated on up to date.

It is interesting to note that the report on seventeen cases is that there is an improvement physical and mental, with satisfactory adjustment. All sterilized cases are returned to the community under guardianship.

I also met Dr. O'Callahan, who does all the operations on cases sent to him in Calgary. He told me that he uses the same operative technique as that employed in California.

Mr. Hoadley, in a recent letter to me, expresses the following opinion :

I hope that the new Health Ministry [English] will again give some consideration to an Act such as was introduced and defeated last summer. Every day and every week and every month should force on a people considering their financial present and their future the question of the increase of pauper and mentally defective population (the two are so closely associated) as a matter of national importance.

### EXPERIENCE IN MICHIGAN

On my return journey I stayed in Northern Michigan, which is one of the twenty-four of the United States operating

a Sterilization Act,\* close to the State Farm for Epileptics, and was able to get into direct communication with the authorities administering the Public Act 1929, No. 281, which was passed in 1923, but not put into active operation until its amendment in 1929. This Act defines the State policy as follows :

(Section I) It is hereby declared to be the policy of the State to prevent the procreation and increase in number of feeble-minded, insane and epileptic persons, idiots, imbeciles, moral degenerates, and sexual pervers, likely to become a menace to society or wards of the State. The provisions of this Act are to be liberally construed to accomplish this purpose.

Dr. Dixon, Medical Superintendent of the Michigan Home and Training School, Lapeer, Mich., writes that although the Act dates from 1923, by far the greater majority of the operations have been done in the last three years, as it took some time to educate the public in this matter. All the operations are performed in the Home and Training School, Lapeer, by a surgeon, Dr. Randall, appointed by the Court. He is not a local doctor, nor an official of the Training School.

\* According to *Social Aspects of Mental Hygiene*, published by the American Academy of Political and Social Science, May 1930, p. 29.

### ALBERTA STERILIZATIONS

	Male.	Female.	Total.
Number of cases presented to the Board ...	23	83	106
*Number of cases approved by the Board ...	22	79	101
Number of operations ...	14	66	80
Follow-up reports on file ...	5	27	32

These reports are divided as follows :

Reports received when patient is under institutional care ...	3	3	} 32
Report received when patient in gaol ...	1	1	
Report received when patient in Salvation Army Home ...	2	2	
Report received when patient in own home or with relatives ...	5	21	

Results with respect to operations are :

Improved physically, mentally, and with satisfactory adjustment	2	15	17	} 32
Physically well, but with no mental change ...	3	10	13	
Fair physically, fair mentally ...		2	2	

\* Including twenty-one cases approved, but not yet completed.

Dr. Dixon tells me the total number of cases operated on up to September 1931 is 606. The greatest per cent. of the cases sterilized are high-grade feeble-minded who have the opportunity of living outside the institution.

The idiots and lower-grade imbeciles are looked upon as custodial cases and segregated within the institution, but occasionally the parents of such patients desire to have them home from time to time, and they are sterilized as a matter of protection.

There are also several cases which are not in the feeble-minded group, according to the test, but there has been a definite reason for each of them.

1. A sexual pervert, a man who has served time in a reformatory for rape.

2. An epileptic girl.

3. A post-encephalitis case.

4. A sex delinquent whose family is defective, and who had had one feeble-minded child.

5. The daughter (born in the institution) of a feeble-minded woman who had had several illegitimate children.

6. A girl of 14 who was a serious problem in the community. She was extremely promiscuous, and was sent with a court order for sterilization and return to the community upon recovery.

The following table summarizes the reports on these 606 cases after extended trial periods away from the institution, but under supervision:

			Male.	Female.	Total.
Discharged	...	...	33	181	214
On parole	...	...	38	85	123
Still in the institution	...	...	66	184	250
Eloped	...	...	4	15	19
			<hr/> 141	<hr/> 465	<hr/> 606

## NON-EUGENIC ADVANTAGES

Dr. Dixon also writes:

We have no specific basis for selection when dealing with the definitely feeble-minded group, and now sterilize practically all who leave here, whether discharged or for vacations and parole. We look at it not wholly as a eugenic measure, but as an aid to the individual adjustment. We have had

a number of girls who have married and, with no children to interfere with the economic efficiency or complicate their lives, they have been able to come up to a fair standard of living. The problem of illegitimacy is of course a prominent factor.

We use all the legal methods of approach, though by far the greater majority of our cases are sterilized on the order of the Court. We discuss the situation with the parents and encourage them to initiate proceedings. We have had very little active or persistent opposition, though some of our parents are reluctant to take the step because of their church affiliations.

The operation used in the simple sterilization of female patients in this institution is salpingectomy. Dr. Randall removes a section of the Fallopian tube a little over an inch long just at its point of entrance into the uterus. The other end is ligated and embedded in the broad ligament.

## THE USE OF CASTRATION

In Michigan certain other cases can also be treated by order of the Court. The Probate Judge can order an operation on certain people with criminal tendencies—castration, instead of sterilization, in some cases. A young man, for instance, who was found lying in wait for a school-mistress was ordered by the Court to be castrated in a State Hospital. After the operation he went home, and now works quietly and happily on the farm with his mother. Before the operation this young man was quite unmanageable. Approximately twenty such cases have been dealt with since 1925.

Dr. Dixon's analysis of his cases raises the important issue of the dangers of promiscuity and the spread of venereal disease by sterilized persons when discharged. I glean from his paragraphs a corroboration of the practical experience of other States—that sterilized persons, contrary to the anticipations of the theoretical sociologist, prove to be markedly less promiscuous than they were before the operation. Since sterilization leaves the physiological functions unimpaired, we must conclude that this is due to the psychological effect of the operation. This is

equally patent in the Report of the Royal Commission of British Columbia (p.CC.27), where Dr. Butler (Sonoma State Home for the Feeble-minded, California) states: "There have been no ill-effects of any nature from the operation, but in fact just the reverse; better physical and mental

condition, especially with the insane." Answering from his experience one of the theoretical objections against sterilization, that it might increase prostitution and venereal disease, Dr. Butler says: "From observation at all our institutions we are decidedly of the opinion that it does not."

## NOTES AND MEMORANDA

### Eugenics in South Africa

THE Race Welfare Society opened a Women's Welfare Centre in Johannesburg on February 2nd, 1932. This is the first institution of its kind in South Africa. Its aim is race improvement, and it caters for the less prosperous mothers who need information on spacing children wisely and on the restriction of child-bearing where disease or poverty render further pregnancies undesirable. It thus functions as a birth-control clinic and, at the same time, serves as a clearing-house to general hospitals for women with gynæcological troubles needing surgical or medical intervention, which they would otherwise be unable to obtain. The sympathy of the medical profession has been enlisted and a panel of qualified medical men and women attend two afternoons weekly. Every woman is seen privately by a doctor, and a trained nurse is in constant attendance. No charge is made for advice and instruction, and appliances are supplied at cost price to those who can pay, and are given free to really needy deserving cases.

During the first three months of its existence, 100 women have availed themselves of the facilities of the Centre, a result which shows the need of such an institution and is considered satisfactory.

The Centre also serves for training doctors and nurses, with a view to extending the work to rural areas, where need for knowledge of birth control is great.

Public interest has been stimulated by a

series of free public lectures on eugenics and its practical applications, given by members of the Race Welfare Society during the last two years.

H. B. FANTHAM, *Chairman.*

### Elections to the Society

THE following have been elected Fellows (starred) and Members of the *Eugenics Society* during the past quarter:

- |                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Miss M. Ashdown.        | Mrs. Rideal.             |
| Prof. Dr. L. Benedek.   | Miss L. Roe.             |
| *Sir Basil Blackett,    | *The Rt. Hon. Sir Leslie |
| K.C.B. (Life Fellow.)   | Scott, K.C.M.G., K.C.    |
| Mrs. Douglas Cockerell. | *Lady Simson.            |
| Dr. Gladys M. Cox.      | Mrs. Skinner.            |
| Mrs. Fuller.            | *A. H. Snell, Esq.       |
| *J. D. Garrett, Esq.    | *E. Gerald Stanley, Esq. |
| *F. Golla, Esq.         | J. Patric L. Stevenson,  |
| *The Rev. J. C. Hard-   | Esq.                     |
| wick.                   | R. J. Whitwell, Esq.     |
| E. F. Warren Hastings,  | Miss Dorothy Wolff       |
| Esq.                    | (re-elected).            |
| Miss E. H. Hawes.       | *The Rev. Dr. J. F.      |
| Miss M. Jackson.        | Worsley-Boden.           |
| *J. F. Peart, Esq.      |                          |

### A Gift to the Library

THE Hon. Librarian wishes to express her grateful thanks to the Hon. Mrs. Grant Duff, who has presented to the *Society* the following volumes from the library of her deceased uncle, St. George Lane Fox-Pitt:

**Sharpey-Schafer, E.** *The Endocrine Organs*, 2 vols., 1926—Part I, *The thyroid, the parathyroids and the suprarenal capsules*; Part II, *The pituitary, the pineal, the alimentary, the pancreas and the sex glands.* (London, 1926. Longmans, Green and Co.)